



# Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

*A Complete Catechesis for Christian Living*

Doctrinal Catechesis Session  
Mary Birmingham

## MARY: MODEL FOR THE CHURCH



Sandro Botticelli, The Annunciation, 1489-90. Public domain.



## Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### Opening prayer

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary,  
that never was it known that anyone who fled to your protection,  
implored your help,  
or sought your intercession was left unaided.  
Inspired by this confidence,  
I fly unto you  
O Virgin of virgins, our mother;  
to you do we come,  
before you we stand, sinful and sorrowful.  
O Mother of the Word Incarnate,  
despise not our petitions,  
but in your mercy hear us and answer us. Amen.

*Memorare, Prayer seeking Mary's Intercession.*

### Note to the Catechist

There may be more material than you can use in a one-hour session.  
Select and arrange accordingly. Use questions and material that is  
best suited for your particular group.



### Read the connecting statement

to draw the line between this week's  
liturgy and this chosen doctrinal theme.

This connecting statement is found in the *Breaking  
Open the Word* worksheet for this week.

#### Catholic Faith, Life & Creed Version 2.0

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Version 2.0 reflects all recent revisions in  
the Roman Missal.

NIHIL OBSTAT  
Rev. Steven Olds  
Censor Liborum

IMPRIMATUR  
† Most Rev. John Noonan  
Bishop of Orlando

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# Sharing Human Experience

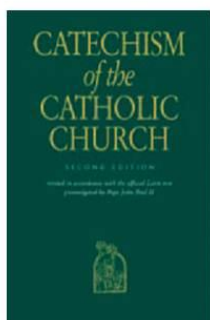
Catechist opens this session with these or similar words:

The Scriptures call us to make room in our hearts for Christ, to enter into intimate communion with God in Christ. Mary, the Mother of God, is a model for us. She teaches us how to enter into that communion by her faithfulness and her willingness to say, “Yes” to God.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in small groups of four. Surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ Consider Mary. She was betrothed to Joseph. The Angel told her that she will conceive God’s Son by the power of the Holy Spirit. Imagine for a moment. What if one of us received such a communication. What would we feel? How would we respond? Who would we trust to tell? Would we trust even our own ability to hear such a message?
- ▶ Imagine further that once people discovered that you were pregnant and unmarried, you would be subject to stoning by virtue of the law itself.
- ▶ Yet Mary’s heart was so opened to God that she was able to transcend all the obstacles, all the “yes, buts,” and say (without knowing the outcome), “Yes. Do to me according to your will.” Trust like that is profound.
- ▶ Let us ask ourselves:
  - Like Mary, am I willing to open my heart and place my life in the service of God’s plan?
  - What would it cost me?
  - How am I presently placing my life in the service of God’s plan?
  - How might I more fully accomplish that goal?

Optional witness: Invite a parishioner who has a special devotion to Mary to come and share for about five minutes about what that devotion has meant to him or her and how they venerate Mary on an ongoing basis and how their devotion to Mary leads them to Christ.



## Sharing Catholic Doctrine

Drawn from the Catechism of the Catholic Church

Refer to articles 437, 456, 484-511, and 967.

### Catechist continues:

- ▶ When the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she would conceive a child by power of the Holy Spirit, the time of fulfillment of God's promises and preparations had finally arrived (CCC 484).
- ▶ *Mary was always a virgin.* Mary was invited to say, "Yes" to God's invitation to bear God's Son, to conceive and bear "the fullness of deity," in other words, to become the Mother of God. She was, as the Church teaches, ever virgin. She was a virgin at the time of Jesus' conception, and she remained a virgin throughout her life.
- ▶ *Mary was predestined to be the mother of God.* Mary was predestined to become the mother of the Christ. The Constitution on the Church (from the Second Vatican Council) says:
  - "The Father of mercies willed that the Incarnation (of Jesus, God's only begotten Son) should be preceded by an assent on the part of the predestined mother, so that just as a woman had a share in the coming of death (Eve) so also should a woman contribute to the coming of life" (LG 56; cf. LG 61).
- ▶ *Mary's "yes" to God was in opposition to Eve's "no" (her disobedience).* God predetermined that a Jewish girl from Nazareth of Galilee who was betrothed to Joseph of the house of David would say "yes" to God's invitation to bear his Son by the power of the Holy Spirit.
  - The Church places Mary opposite Eve who had a share in the downfall of humanity in the garden when she disobeyed God (along with Adam). The new Eve, rather than disobey God, said "yes" and thus through her "fiat" (yes) gave birth to the promised Messiah.
- ▶ *Many holy women prepared for the mission of Mary.* The Church teaches that throughout the Old Testament, the mission of many holy women prepared for the ultimate mission of Mary (CCC, 489).
  - Eve: In spite of Eve's disobedience, she was nevertheless promised that she would be the mother of all the living.
  - Sarah: Because of this promise, Sarah conceived a promised child in spite of her old age. God chose the weak and powerless to show his faithfulness to



his people.

- Biblical heroines: Great women, biblical heroines, such as Hanna, the mother of Samuel, Deborah; Ruth, Judith, and Esther and many other women were instruments of God's plan of salvation throughout salvation history.
- ▶ *Mary*: Mary, however, stands out among them as a humble, poor servant of God who was willing to be his instrument. Israel waited for so long, for generations, for God's promises to be fulfilled. They were fulfilled in and through Mary's faithful obedience to God.
- ▶ *Immaculate Conception*. The Church teaches that God graced Mary from birth; she was redeemed by God from her conception (CCC 491). That means she was free from original sin.
  - Pope Pius IX in 1854 infallibly declared that Mary was immaculately conceived, that she was born without sin. The immaculate conception of Mary was accomplished through Jesus Christ. God the Father chose her before the creation of the world to be free from sin and "blameless before him in love" (492).
  - The Church further teaches that Mary remained free from sin throughout her life. This is what we celebrate on December 8, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.
- ▶ What the Church teaches about "Mary is based on what it believes about Christ, and what it teaches about Mary illumines in turn its faith in Christ" (CCC 487).
- ▶ It is important to note that the basis of the Church's teaching regarding Mary is its belief in Jesus Christ.
- ▶ Mary's role is to magnify the Lord. When we look through a magnifying glass, the object becomes larger. When we look through Mary, whose role is to enlarge Christ, we see Christ more visibly, more clearly, and more intimately.
- ▶ Mary is the model par excellence of the Church and for the Church. She is a member of the Church. She prefigures the Church. She is a model for and a foreshadowing of the "exemplary realization" of the Church. In other words, we can look to Mary to understand the nature and role of Mother Church (CCC, 967).
- ▶ Mary, as the first Christian is a model for how to reveal Christ to the world and how to live the Christian message. She is the model disciple. She teaches us how to be a disciple.

Catechist invites the participants to respond to the following questions in dyads, then surface insights in the wider group. Catechist responds by sharing from his or her own life experience. See appendix #1 for an example.

- ▶ In what way does Mary teach us how to be a disciple?
- ▶ What exactly does she teach us?
- ▶ How might devotion to Mary invite you to be a better disciple?
- ▶ If she is a model for us, what exactly does she model and what can you emulate, admire, and imitate?

### Important distinction: Catholics venerate Mary.

- ▶ Catholics do not worship Mary; we venerate her.
- ▶ We give her the highest honor. She had a significant, premier role in the redemption of the world.
- ▶ Our faith concerning the veneration of Mary is based on our worship of Christ.
- ▶ Our veneration of Mary should never overshadow our worship of Christ.
- ▶ Mary's role is to lead us to her Son.
- ▶ Just as our own mothers intercede and are advocates for us, all the more does Mary intercede for us to her Son and to the Father.

### Mary Seat of Wisdom:

- ▶ In the Litany of Loretto Mary is called, the "Seat of Wisdom." Art renditions of this image portray Mary on a throne with the child Jesus in her lap. She is given this title because she bore Jesus, the Son of God, whom the Scriptures refer to as the word and as wisdom of God.
- ▶ She gave birth to God's Son, God's wisdom in the flesh. During Jesus' early years, she sat him on her lap and nurtured him, thus becoming the "throne" of wisdom.
- ▶ Cardinal John H. Newman's reflection on *Mary, Seat of Wisdom*, invites us to imagine the relationship between Mary and her son Jesus. Jesus lived with his mother until he set forth on the fulfillment of his saving mission. That is, he lived with her for 30 years. Imagine the profound wisdom she gleaned of his wisdom of things past, present, and future! Thus, even though Mary was a woman of humble origins, Cardinal Newman suggested that she must far surpass the most advanced philosopher or theologian that ever lived. Her understanding of things pertaining to God must exceed that of the most advanced spiritual thinker of any age. Imagine the conversations about the awesomeness of God that she must have had with her son! Surely, Jesus would have given praise and worship to his Father. Surely, Jesus would have shared the wisdom of his Father with his own mother!
- ▶ While Moses had occasion to see God face to face only on occasion, Mary was his privileged companion for 30 years! One can only imagine the questions she asked and the answers he gave, answers given by the Eternal God.
- ▶ Cf. "The Mystical Rose" (Thoughts on the Blessed Virgin from the writings of Cardinal J. H. Newman) St. Paul Publications 1955.

### Marian Devotion

- ▶ Christ is the focus of Marian devotion.
- ▶ Church teaching about Mary is best summed up in the liturgical feasts of the year.
- ▶ The Church's devotion to the Blessed Virgin is intrinsic to Christian worship (CCC, 971).
- ▶ She has been honored in the Church from the earliest times of Christianity.
- ▶ The liturgical feasts and Marian prayer, such as the rosary (which sums up the gospel), best expresses our devotion to Mary.

## Feasts of Mary

Note to catechists: If time is an issue, choose the most significant feasts to comment upon, and refer participants to the other feasts that are also listed on the participant handout.

### ***Mary Mother of God (January 1, solemnity)***

- Celebration of Mary, bearer of Christ who came to save the world and mother of the newborn Christ child. Mary kept the awesome, salvific events of God in her heart, inviting all believers to begin their new year by reflecting on the marvels of God. This feast stresses the true nature of Christ, his humanity and divinity, and honors Mary as the Mother of God

### ***Presentation of the Lord (February 2, feast)***

- This feast celebrates the presentation of Jesus in the temple by his parents. Mary and Joseph encounter Anna and Simeon. Both proclaim the faith of the Jewish people. The feast remembers Christ, the high priest, and the enlightenment and reconciliation he brings through his presence.

### ***Our Lady of Lourdes (February 11, optional memorial)***

- The feast celebrates the apparition, the appearance of Mary to Bernadette Soubirous at Lourdes on Feb 11, 1858. This is the only remembrance of a Marian apparition in the Church's calendar because Lourdes is still to this day an important place of healing and pilgrimage.

### ***Annunciation of the Lord (March 25, solemnity)***

- This is a celebration commemorating the Incarnation of God's Son within Mary's womb, nine months before the celebration of Christ's birth. Passover was celebrated on March 25. Early Christians associated the creation and the end of the world as well as the conception and the crucifixion of Jesus March 25. Thus, it is possible that the date of Christmas had more to do with this date than any of the other hypothesis concerning the origin of the date of Christmas. (Nine months after March 25 is December 25.) The Annunciation, in summary, honors the virginal conception of Christ by the power of the Spirit.

### ***Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (May 31, feast)***

- Visitation celebrates the working of the Holy Spirit. Mary was inspired by the Holy Spirit to visit her cousin Elizabeth. One hypothesis for the placement of this feast that remembers Mary's visit to Elizabeth who is pregnant with John the Baptist is that it is placed after the feast of the Annunciation of the Lord (where it occurs in the gospel account in Luke) and before the feast of the Birth of John the Baptist. This feast celebrates the great joy of the people of Israel (represented by Elizabeth) and the community of believers (represented by Mary) over the coming of the Messiah.

***Immaculate Heart of Mary (Saturday following the Second Sunday after Pentecost, optional memorial)***

- ▶ Pope Pius XII consecrated the war-torn world to the heart of Mary on Aug. 22, 1942. The heart is believed to be the center of the person's physical and spiritual being. Thus, this feast celebrates life and love and the invitation to live according to the example of Mary who heard the word of God and acted on it.

***Our Lady of Mount Carmel (July 16, optional memorial)***

- ▶ This feast originates from the Carmelite fathers' devotion to Mary who they venerated as the patroness of those who have embraced the life of contemplation. This feast is associated with the brown scapular that signifies our willingness to put on the clothing of Mary's fidelity.

***Assumption of Blessed Virgin Mary (August 15, solemnity)***

- ▶ The Assumption of Mary into heaven was intended to strengthen our belief in the resurrection of the body. The feast also honors Mary who shares a unique union with God in Christ from the very beginning through the end of her life. This oldest of Marian feasts celebrates Mary's assumption into heaven and her unique grace-filled status. Mary, as a representative of the human family, already shares Christ's divine nature (as is the heritage of all believers). She is a sign that heaven is now open to all believers. This feast is a message of hope for all faithful disciples.

***Queenship of Mary (August 22, memorial)***

- ▶ The Queenship of Mary honors Mary as queen and mother of the human race. This theme reflects that Mary now shares the Beatific Vision (heaven). She already shares the fulfillment of Jesus' saving mission.

***Birth of Mary (September 8, feast)***

- ▶ This feast celebrates the birth of Mary and her special status as a grace-filled gift to the human race. The only births that are celebrated in the liturgical calendar are those who had a direct role in the messianic reign of Christ, Mary, John the Baptist, and Jesus.

***Immaculate Conception (December 8, solemnity)***

- ▶ This feast celebrates the utter graciousness of God toward humanity in that Mary was conceived without original sin due to grace, not merit.

***Our Lady of Sorrows (September 15, memorial)***

- ▶ Our Lady of Sorrows remembers the suffering of Mary and reminds us that the Church is united with Christ through suffering and death so that we may live eternally with him.
- ▶ This feast comes after the feast of the Triumph of the Cross. It invites reflection on Mary's suffering as she experiences the suffering of her son. It also invites us to reflect on God's presence to the human race in the face of trial and suffering.



## Some Approved Marian Apparitions

- ▶ The Church does not require belief in Marian apparitions. An apparition is an appearance of Mary to various individuals at various times in the history of the Church. The Church reserves the right to declare some apparitions to be inauthentic and others to be “worthy of belief.” The Church rigorously investigates the authenticity of such apparitions. Three apparitions have been declared worthy of belief and devotion and thus are encouraged. These three have authenticated miracles associated with them.
  - *Lourdes*: Our Lady appeared 18 times at Lourdes, in the Pyrenees Mountains in southern France, in 1858, to Bernadette Soubirous, a 14-year-old peasant girl. Sixty miracles unexplained by science are associated with this site.
  - *Guadalupe*: On December 9, 1531, an Aztec Indian, Juan Diego, saw the Virgin Mary near Mexico City. Mary imprinted her image on his cloak. The cloak is on display in the shrine of Guadalupe. The cloth should have disintegrated in about 30 years but due to unexplained science, it is still in good condition.
  - *Fatima*: Our Lady appeared six times to three small children (each under ten years of age) in Fatima, Portugal. Mary asked that we repent and pray the Rosary and her prayer to the Immaculate Heart. She thus assured that God would prevent Russia from spreading atheism throughout the world. This was said when Russia was under the control of the Czar, and Russia was still a religious country. Thousands, including nonbelievers, saw the great miracle of the sun dancing on Oct 13, 1917.
  - Medjugore. The apparitions of Medjugore have not as yet been pronounced authentic. The Church advises caution.



## Community Connections

Catechist invites participants to relate what was shared today to some experience in their lives. Catechist relates an experience from his or her own life and invites participants to respond in small groups of two or four. See appendix #2 for an example.

- ▶ How might Mary speak to what is going on in your life right now?
- ▶ How might Mary advise you in some of the struggles you have had or are presently encountering?
- ▶ How might she celebrate with you in the joys you are presently enjoying?

Liturgy, Scripture, and doctrine challenge us to transform our lives so that we can go out and help transform the world.



## Mystagogy & your decision for change

Catechist informs the group of any parish activity taking place and makes arrangements for group participation. For example: Mary is the model disciple. Disciples take Christ to the world. Our parish sponsors a home for homeless mothers and their children. The center needs all kinds of volunteers. This weekend we are meeting to prepare one of the buildings for occupancy. We are meeting Saturday morning with other parishioners to work on this worthy project.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions. Continue to respond to these questions throughout the week in your journal.

- ▶ How might you be challenged to live as a better disciple as a result of what we have shared today?
- ▶ In what way, if any, does Mary inspire you to react differently to given situations in your life?
- ▶ Perhaps you might commit to say the Rosary or the Litany of Loreto in your homes throughout the week.



## Closing Prayer

**Leader:** Rather than our customary prayer, let us end this session by praying the...

**Litany of Loreto: Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary**

Lord, have mercy on us. Christ, have mercy on us.

Lord, have mercy on us. Christ, have mercy on us.

Lord, have mercy on us. Christ, hear us. Christ, graciously hear us.

God, the Father of heaven, have mercy on us.

God the Son, Redeemer of the world, have mercy on us.

God the Holy Ghost, have mercy on us.

Holy Trinity, one God, have mercy on us.

Holy Mary, pray for us.

Holy Mother of God, pray for us.

Holy Virgin of virgins, pray for us.

Mother of Christ, pray for us.

Mother of divine grace, pray for us.

Mother most pure, pray for us.

Mother most chaste, pray for us.

Mother inviolate, pray for us.

Mother undefiled, pray for us.

Mother most amiable, pray for us.

Mother most admirable, pray for us.

Mother of good counsel, pray for us.

Mother of our Creator, pray for us.

Mother of our Savior, pray for us.

Virgin most prudent, pray for us.

Virgin most venerable, pray for us.

Virgin most renowned, pray for us.

Virgin most powerful, pray for us.

Virgin most merciful, pray for us.

Virgin most faithful, pray for us.

Mirror of justice, pray for us.

Seat of wisdom, pray for us.

Cause of our joy, pray for us.

Spiritual vessel, pray for us.

Vessel of honor, pray for us.

Singular vessel of devotion, pray for us.

Mystical rose, pray for us.

Tower of David, pray for us.

Tower of ivory, pray for us.  
House of gold, pray for us.  
Ark of the Covenant, pray for us.  
Gate of heaven, pray for us.  
Morning star, pray for us.  
Health of the sick, pray for us.  
Refuge of sinners, pray for us.  
Comforter of the afflicted, pray for us.  
Help of Christians, pray for us.  
Queen of Angels, pray for us.  
Queen of Patriarchs, pray for us.  
Queen of Prophets, pray for us.  
Queen of Apostles, pray for us.  
Queen of Martyrs, pray for us.  
Queen of Confessors, pray for us.  
Queen of Virgins, pray for us.  
Queen of all Saints, pray for us.  
Queen conceived without original sin, pray for us.  
Queen assumed into heaven, pray for us.  
Queen of the most holy Rosary, pray for us.  
Queen of Peace, pray for us.  
Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, spare us, O Lord.  
Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, graciously hear us O Lord Lamb of  
God, who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.  
V. Pray for us, O holy Mother of God.  
R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

**Leader:** Let us offer our prayers of intercession.

**Leader:** Let us offer one another a sign of peace.

## Appendix

1. Mary is a model for our lives. She is a model for my own life. When I put myself in her shoes, I am overwhelmed by her “yes” to God. If God asked me to do something that at first glance seemed an absolute absurdity and that would risk my life, I would first question my own ability to hear God. Second, I would be incredulous that God would ask it in the first place. Yet Mary did not hesitate to say, “Yes, Lord, your will be done.” Mary’s “yes” reveals an intimate prayer life. She recognized God’s voice in her life. I pray for the courage to pray Mary’s prayer.

What I have learned from Mary and from my own faith journey is that God is faithful. When I sincerely pray as Mary prayed, God is always faithful. One significant event that required a similar “yes” on my part comes to mind. I was a director of music and liturgy in a brand new parish in the Midwest. I loved my job. My husband came home one day and informed me that he was being transferred to Florida. I was so angry. It was November, and I would never be able to find a similar job so late in the fall. Looking heavenward I mused, “Lord, you’ve got to be kidding! What are you thinking?”

My first selfish inclination was to tell my husband to go in peace and have a great life! Fleeting as it was, that thought did not last long. I spent the afternoon in prayer. I argued and cajoled. I finally wondered if God was asking me to stay home with the children and not continue in full time parish ministry. After several hours I let go and prayed, “Your will, not mine, Lord.”

The next morning a national bulletin was sitting on my desk with a parish job opening in the state of Florida. Three weeks later one dad, one mom, four children, two dogs, and a cat were on their way to forge a new life in a small beach community in Florida. Our lives would be forever changed. God led the way, God ordained the journey; God had plans for our lives; God invited us to trust in unimaginable ways.

Mary is a model disciple. She shows us what it means to abandon our lives to God’s will. Every time I have yielded to that abandonment, I am blessed in untold ways. Why then do I so often resist and initially respond with a “no” or with anger? Mary continues to be a beacon of light to remind me how to say, “Yes, Lord, your will be done, not mine.”

2. At various times throughout my life when my children have suffered terribly, I am reminded of Mary who stood at the foot of the cross and watched her son as he was innocently tortured and put to death.

Her sorrow has supported me in my sorrow as I watch the tortuous illness of schizophrenia rob my innocent child of his life. He is tortured by demon voices that deride and taunt him all the day. His love for God in the midst of such pain is an inspiration. He understands life as the most precious gift he has been given and refuses to give in to the voices of hatred and death.



I am this young man's mother. I am powerless over the ravages of his illness. Mary was powerless to stop the horror before her. However, she stood at the foot of his cross and consoled him with a mother's love, consoled him in her arms as she did when she nurtured him as a small child. While she had to be in awe and at the same time disappointed and confused at what was taking place before her, her mind racing, "Had she heard incorrectly? What was God doing? Could this all truly be happening?" the faith that had sustained her throughout her life sustained her at the hour of her greatest need. Above all, even though she was in awe at the God/child that hung before her on the cross, to her, he was her baby, her child. That bond ripped through her heart. She too was tortured at the ordeal she witnessed.

Mary stands as one who goes before us all, especially mothers, who watch the pain and sorrow of their children. She reminds me that there are times that all I can do is love my child, and abandon him to the care of God. Many a time Mary has accompanied us as parents in the excruciatingly painful act of having one's child committed against his will to a psychiatric unit. She knows the powerlessness over the pain and sorrow parents watch their children endure. She went before us; she walked in our shoes. I take great comfort in the Mother of God who walked the walk and who walks it still with us today.

## Handout for Mary: Model of the Church

- ▶ When the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she would conceive a child by power of the Holy Spirit, the time of fulfillment of God's promises and preparations had finally arrived (CCC 484).
- ▶ *Mary was always a virgin.* Mary was invited to say, "Yes" to God's invitation to bear God's Son, to conceive and bear "the fullness of deity," in other words, to become the Mother of God. She was, as the Church teaches, ever virgin. She was a virgin at the time of Jesus' conception, and she remained a virgin throughout her life.
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- ▶ Cardinal John H. Newman’s reflection on *Mary, Seat of Wisdom*, invites us to imagine the relationship between Mary and her son Jesus. Jesus lived with his

mother until he set forth on the fulfillment of his saving mission. That is, he lived with her for 30 years. Imagine the profound wisdom she gleaned of his wisdom of things past, present, and future! Thus, even though Mary was a woman of humble origins, Cardinal Newman suggested that she must far surpass the most advanced philosopher or theologian that ever lived. Her understanding of things pertaining to God must exceed that of the most advanced spiritual thinker of any age.

Imagine the conversations about the awesomeness of God that she must have had with her son! Surely, Jesus would have given praise and worship to his Father. Surely, Jesus would have shared the wisdom of his Father with his own mother!

- ▶ While Moses had occasion to see God face to face only on occasion, Mary was his privileged companion for 30 years! One can only imagine the questions she asked and the answers he gave, answers given by the Eternal God.
- ▶ Cf. “The Mystical Rose” (Thoughts on the Blessed Virgin from the writings of Cardinal J. H. Newman) St. Paul Publications 1955.

## Marian Devotion

- ▶ Christ is the focus of Marian devotion.
- ▶ Church teaching about Mary is best summed up in the liturgical feasts of the year.
- ▶ The Church’s devotion to the Blessed Virgin is intrinsic to Christian worship (CCC, 971).
- ▶ She has been honored in the Church from the earliest times of Christianity.
- ▶ The liturgical feasts and Marian prayer, such as the rosary (which sums up the gospel), best expresses our devotion to Mary.

## Feasts of Mary

### *Mary Mother of God (January 1, solemnity)*

- ▶ Celebration of Mary, bearer of Christ who came to save the world and mother of the newborn Christ child. Mary kept the awesome, salvific events of God in her heart, inviting all believers to begin their new year by reflecting on the marvels of God. This feast stresses the true nature of Christ, his humanity and divinity, and honors Mary as the Mother of God

### *Presentation of the Lord (February 2, feast)*

- ▶ This feast celebrates the presentation of Jesus in the temple by his parents. Mary and Joseph encounter Anna and Simeon. Both proclaim the faith of the Jewish people. The feast remembers Christ, the high priest, and the enlightenment and reconciliation he brings through his presence.

### *Our Lady of Lourdes (February 11, optional memorial)*

- ▶ The feast celebrates the apparition, the appearance of Mary to Bernadette Soubirous at Lourdes on Feb 11, 1858. This is the only remembrance of a Marian apparition in the Church’s calendar because Lourdes is still to this day an important place of healing and pilgrimage.

### ***Annunciation of the Lord (March 25, solemnity)***

- This is a celebration commemorating the Incarnation of God's Son within Mary's womb, nine months before the celebration of Christ's birth. Passover was celebrated on March 25. Early Christians associated the creation and the end of the world as well as the conception and the crucifixion of Jesus March 25. Thus, it is possible that the date of Christmas had more to do with this date than any of the other hypothesis concerning the origin of the date of Christmas. (Nine months after March 25 is December 25.) The Annunciation, in summary, honors the virginal conception of Christ by the power of the Spirit.

### ***Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (May 31, feast)***

- Visitation celebrates the working of the Holy Spirit. Mary was inspired by the Holy Spirit to visit her cousin Elizabeth. One hypothesis for the placement of this feast that remembers Mary's visit to Elizabeth who is pregnant with John the Baptist is that it is placed after the feast of the Annunciation of the Lord (where it occurs in the gospel account in Luke) and before the feast of the Birth of John the Baptist. This feast celebrates the great joy of the people of Israel (represented by Elizabeth) and the community of believers (represented by Mary) over the coming of the Messiah.

### ***Immaculate Heart of Mary (Saturday following the Second Sunday after Pentecost, optional memorial)***

- Pope Pius XII consecrated the war-torn world to the heart of Mary on Aug. 22, 1942. The heart is believed to be the center of the person's physical and spiritual being. Thus, this feast celebrates life and love and the invitation to live according to the example of Mary who heard the word of God and acted on it.

### ***Our Lady of Mount Carmel (July 16, optional memorial)***

- This feast originates from the Carmelite fathers' devotion to Mary who they venerated as the patroness of those who have embraced the life of contemplation. This feast is associated with the brown scapular that signifies our willingness to put on the clothing of Mary's fidelity.

### ***Assumption of Blessed Virgin Mary (August 15, solemnity)***

- The Assumption of Mary into heaven was intended to strengthen our belief in the resurrection of the body. The feast also honors Mary who shares a unique union with God in Christ from the very beginning through the end of her life. This oldest of Marian feasts celebrates Mary's assumption into heaven and her unique grace-filled status. Mary, as a representative of the human family, already shares Christ's divine nature (as is the heritage of all believers). She is a sign that heaven is now open to all believers. This feast is a message of hope for all faithful disciples.

### ***Queenship of Mary (August 22, memorial)***

- The Queenship of Mary honors Mary as queen and mother of the human race. This theme reflects that Mary now shares the Beatific Vision (heaven). She already



shares the fulfillment of Jesus' saving mission.

***Birth of Mary (September 8, feast)***

- ▶ This feast celebrates the birth of Mary and her special status as a grace-filled gift to the human race. The only births that are celebrated in the liturgical calendar are those who had a direct role in the messianic reign of Christ, Mary, John the Baptist, and Jesus.

***Immaculate Conception (December 8, solemnity)***

- ▶ This feast celebrates the utter graciousness of God toward humanity in that Mary was conceived without original sin due to grace, not merit.

***Our Lady of Sorrows (September 15, memorial)***

- ▶ Our Lady of Sorrows remembers the suffering of Mary and reminds us that the Church is united with Christ through suffering and death so that we may live eternally with him.
- ▶ This feast comes after the feast of the Triumph of the Cross. It invites reflection on Mary's suffering as she experiences the suffering of her son. It also invites us to reflect on God's presence to the human race in the face of trial and suffering.

**Some Approved Marian Apparitions**

- ▶ The Church does not require belief in Marian apparitions. An apparition is an appearance of Mary to various individuals at various times in the history of the Church. The Church reserves the right to declare some apparitions to be inauthentic and others to be "worthy of belief." The Church rigorously investigates the authenticity of such apparitions. Three apparitions have been declared worthy of belief and devotion and thus are encouraged. These three have authenticated miracles associated with them.
  - *Lourdes*: Our Lady appeared 18 times at Lourdes, in the Pyrenees Mountains in southern France, in 1858, to Bernadette Soubirous, a 14-year-old peasant girl. Sixty miracles unexplained by science are associated with this site.
  - *Guadalupe*: On December 9, 1531, an Aztec Indian, Juan Diego, saw the Virgin Mary near Mexico City. Mary imprinted her image on his cloak. The cloak is on display in the shrine of Guadalupe. The cloth should have disintegrated in about 30 years but due to unexplained science, it is still in good condition.
  - *Fatima*: Our Lady appeared six times to three small children (each under ten years of age) in Fatima, Portugal. Mary asked that we repent and pray the Rosary and her prayer to the Immaculate Heart. She thus assured that God would prevent Russia from spreading atheism throughout the world. This was said when Russia was under the control of the Czar, and Russia was still a religious country. Thousands, including nonbelievers, saw the great miracle of the sun dancing on Oct 13, 1917.
  - *Medjugore*. The apparitions of Medjugore have not as yet been pronounced authentic. The Church advises caution.